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PP RUEHAG RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHCV #1635/01 3362116  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 012116Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2204  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 001635

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/01/2028  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [VE](#) [KDEM](#)  
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION GOVERNOR PROFILES

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,  
FOR REASON 1.4(D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The opposition won five of 22 governorships in the November 23 state and local elections and will govern approximately 40 percent of Venezuelans. Four of the five opposition governors are political veterans with extensive administrative experience. Morel Rodriguez, the re-elected governor of Nueva Esparta, and Henrique Salas Feo, a former governor of Carabobo, are taking on responsibilities they have already had. Tachira's new governor, Carlos Perez Vivas, has considerable National Assembly experience. New Miranda governor Henrique Capriles Radonski served two terms as the mayor of the Baruta borough of Caracas (to mixed reviews) and a stint as the National Assembly president. Zulia's new governor, Pablo Perez, has less experience than the others, but served as outgoing governor Manuel Rosales' right-hand during the last two years. All five opposition governors are interested in close ties with the United States. While the opposition governors are well-prepared, they will face considerable administrative challenges, particularly if the Chavez government circumvents or starves them of resources. End Summary.

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CARABOBO - HENRIQUE SALAS FEO  
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¶2. (SBU) Henrique Salas Feo served as governor of Carabobo, for two consecutive terms (1995-2004). He defeated both PSUV candidate Mario Silva and incumbent governor and PSUV dissident Luis Acosta Carlez by winning 48 percent of the vote. He served his first term under the old constitution and therefore was eligible to run again. A government supporter unsuccessfully appealed to the Venezuelan court system to declare Salas Feo ineligible to run during the 2008 campaign. In 1993, Salas Feo was elected Deputy to the National Assembly (Venezuela then had a bicameral legislature with an upper house Senate). Salas Feo founded the political party Proyecto Venezuela with his father, former governor of Carabobo, Henrique Salas Romer in 1998. Salas Romer ran unsuccessfully for president in 1998.

¶3. (C) Salas Feo met with the Ambassador on August 30, shortly before the BRV expulsion of the Ambassador. The newly elected governor of Carabobo has repeatedly expressed interest in strengthening ties with the United States. Expressing concern about the growth of drug-trafficking in Carabobo, he told us that he would be a U.S. counternarcotics "ally." Salas Feo was born in Connecticut in 1960. He previously held Venezuelan and U.S. citizenship, but renounced his U.S. citizenship earlier this year in order to

run for office.

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MIRANDA - HENRIQUE CAPRILES RADONSKI  
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¶4. (SBU) Henrique Capriles Radonski defeated close Chavez confidant Diosdado Cabello 54 percent to 46 percent. Capriles Radonski was most recently mayor of the affluent Baruta borough of Caracas for two consecutive terms (2000-2008). He earned a law degree from Andres Bello Catholic University (UCAB) with a specialization in finance and tax law. Upon completing his degree in Venezuela, Radonski pursued advanced studies in Amsterdam and the United States. Prior to serving as mayor, Radonski was president of the National Assembly. At age 25, Capriles Radonski was the youngest member ever elected to fill the charge. A key leader within the opposition Primero Justicia (PJ) party, Capriles Radonski ran as a consensus opposition candidate after the Comptroller declared former Miranda governor Enrique Mendoza ineligible to run based on administrative sanctions.

¶5. (C) During the April 2002 interregnum, Capriles Radonski attempted to de-escalate an opposition assault on the Cuban Embassy. The GBRV accused him of being complicit in the incident and for allegedly inciting violence. Radonski served four months in prison before he was acquitted of all charges in 2006. The GBRV, however, is appealing the acquittal, and Capriles Radonski could face another trial. Local pundits give Capriles Radonski mixed reviews for his administration of the affluent Caracas borough Baruta. The outgoing Baruta mayor (where the U.S. Embassy is located) was very accessible to USG officials and welcomed U.S. cooperation. Capriles Radonski was born in 1973. He is an

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avid runner. He is single.

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NUEVA ESPARTA - MOREL RODRIGUEZ  
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¶6. (SBU) Morel Rodriguez has served four terms as governor of Nueva Esparta (1989-2004), one of Venezuela's most popular tourist destinations that includes Margarita Island. He won re-election against the PSUV's William Farinas winning 58 percent of the vote, more than any other opposition governor.

Though previously a high ranking member within Accion Democratica (AD), Rodriguez was expelled from the party. He subsequently organized his own regional party and campaigned as an opposition independent. In addition to his gubernatorial role, Rodriguez is a former president and deputy in the Nueva Esparta State Assembly. He was born in ¶1942.

¶7. (C) While in office, Rodriguez has focused on improving the state's economy and providing basic social services to the poor, a significant segment of Nueva Esparta's population. He met with the Ambassador on July 27 and underscored the importance of the tourism industry in his state.

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TACHIRA - CESAR PEREZ VIVAS  
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¶8. (SBU) Cesar Perez Vivas has served three consecutive terms as a National Congressional Deputy for Tachira state (1989-2000) and one term as a National Assembly Deputy (2000-2005). He ran unsuccessfully for the Tachira governorship two times, before defeating the PSUV's Leonardo Salcedo in the 2008 gubernatorial race, winning 50 percent of the vote. He earned a law degree from the Catholic University of Tachira and subsequently pursued a Master of Administrative Law from the prestigious, public Central

University of Venezuela (UCV). A practicing lawyer as well as a university professor, Vivas was the former Secretary General of Venezuela's Christian Democratic Party (COPEI).

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ZULIA - PABLO PEREZ  
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¶9. (C) Pablo Perez is widely perceived as the protege of outgoing Zulia governor and Un Nuevo Tiempo leader Manuel Rosales. For the last few years, Perez has served as Rosales' Cabinet Secretary (the number two slot in the Zulia State government). He ran for mayor of Maracaibo in 2004, but was narrowly defeated by GianCarlo DiMartino, the same person he defeated in the 2008 gubernatorial race 54 percent to 46 percent. Perez has visited the United States for tourism a couple of times in recent years and is favorably disposed toward the United States.

¶10. (SBU) Perez began his political career as the regional university representative for AD in the early 1990s. Upon earning his law degree from the University of Zulia, Perez joined the Lawyer's Association of Zulia state, where he would later serve as secretary and vice president for the board of directors. Shortly thereafter, Perez pursued an advanced degree in Municipal Management from the Institute of Advanced Administrative Studies in Zulia. Perez began working with Maracaibo government in 1995 and has served as Environmental Director, as well as Secretary of Citizenship and Prevention. Born in 1969, Perez is married and has two children.

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COMMENT  
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¶11. (C) All five opposition governors face considerable administrative challenges. In Tachira and Carabobo, the opposition governors will have to confront PSUV majorities in the state assemblies. The PSUV won six of 11 mayorships in Nueva Esparta, 16 of 29 mayorships in Tachira and 15 of 20 mayorships in Miranda. The PSUV won 13 of 19 mayorships in Zulia, including the large San Francisco municipality next to Maracaibo, which had been run by an opposition mayor. Moreover, the outgoing PSUV governments in Miranda, Tachira, and Carabobo have already transferred institutions, transport networks, and resources to the central government. During a November 30 nationally televised speech, President Chavez

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said he would be watching opposition governments carefully and would not "permit violations against the people."

CAULFIELD